

# Making America Organic...One Home At a Time!



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## A Hard Bill to Swallow

By Harold Meyerson

Last week, even as Congress with great fanfare was protecting the American people against whatever mischief the harbor barons of Dubai were contemplating, it quietly decided to strip some long-standing protections from the same American people at the behest of our very own food industry. Last Wednesday the House passed the National Uniformity for Food Act, which might better be named the Swallow at Your Own Risk Act.

In one swoop, the bill preempts roughly 200 state laws governing food safety. The theory here is that we lack uniform national standards in such areas as lead and arsenic content, milk and shellfish safety, and the stuff that goes into food coloring and additives. National standards, the bill's champions argue, would be good for the whole country.

Funny thing, though. The bill doesn't set any national standards. It doesn't require that the Food and Drug Administration set such standards. It merely reserves to the FDA the right to set such standards, and negates a slew of laws that every single state has enacted over the past 60 years to make up for the FDA's neglect of food safety.

In Utah, lawmakers enacted a law that sets standards for what can go into food additives -- standards that are stricter than the feds'. In California last year Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law a bill that banned lead from imported Mexican candy, after medical research showed that even minute quantities were dangerous to small children. And 16 states have passed laws establishing safety standards for shellfish, in the absence of any federal regulations.

Now the House has decreed that all these state statutes are preempted by federal regulations -- even if there are no germane federal

regulations. States that wish to retain their standards can appeal to the FDA, which would have 180 days to rule on the appeals. Problem is, the Congressional Budget Office estimates it would cost the FDA \$100 million to review all those statutes. The FDA doesn't have the money, and when the bill came to the floor last week, the Republican leadership didn't permit a vote on an amendment that would have appropriated the funds.

The other problem is the FDA itself, which under the Bush administration has given "political science" a whole new meaning. It's the FDA that overruled its scientists to keep the morning-after pill off the shelves of America's pharmacies. It requires absolutely no leap of imagination to envision an FDA that comforts the food industry and afflicts consumers.

It's the food industry, of course, that cooked up this legislative swill. The bill's backers include most supermarket chains, and such food giants as Cargill, Coca-Cola, ConAgra and Kraft -- mega-contributors all. Its opponents include not just the usual consumer and environmental groups but a bipartisan group of 39 state attorneys general.

You may have missed the protest of the bill's opponents, however, and for good reason. Though the act has been kicking around since the late 1990s, Congress hasn't held a single hearing on its provisions. Last Dec. 15 the bill came before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. No witnesses were called. No testimony was taken. No expert opinion was solicited; no food conglomerate itemized its grievances; and no reports were submitted. No one even made the case for why the bill was needed.

It was simply put to a vote. Then, last week, when all eyes were on the Dubai deal, the

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### Harvest Blend Regular

- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Romaine Lettuce
- Red Onions
- Celery
- Grape Tomatoes
- Russet Potatoes
- Zucchini
- Fuji Apples
- Valencia Oranges
- Bosc Pears
- Ruby Grapefruit
- Atualfo Mango
- Lemons

See the web site for details on our other options. Produce bag contents are subject to change based on availability.

### You Don't Say...

"Our country friends, who have not yet paid their subscription, are respectfully informed that we have to buy all the vegetables for table use, and those who have cabbage, potatoes, or anything of that kind to spare can paid their indebtedness in that way." - Notice in the Marshall, Missouri Democrat, Nov 28, 1858.

"The beet is the most intense of vegetables. The radish, admittedly, is more feverish, but the fire of the radish is a cold fire, the fire of discontent, not of passion. Tomatoes are lusty enough, yet there runs through tomatoes an undercurrent of frivolity. Beets are deadly serious." - Tom Robbins

"A fruit is a vegetable with looks and money. Plus, if you let fruit rot, it turns into wine, something Brussels sprouts never do." - P. J. O'Rourke

"A vegetarian is a person who won't eat anything that can have children." - David Brenner

Republican leadership suddenly sent the bill to the floor, under a rule that limited debate and prohibited most amendments. It passed, 283 to 139, with 212 Republicans and 71 Democrats voting yes -- prima facie evidence that the Republicans deserve to lose control of Congress and that Democrats don't yet deserve to win it.

"What did Energy and Commerce base its decision on?" asks Henry Waxman, the Los Angeles Democrat who led the opposition to this mischief. "There was no analysis. There was no evaluation. Republicans just followed their leaders, and some Democrats who had initially signed on as co-sponsors were waiting, presumably,

for somebody authoritative to review the bill. But there was no review, and some of them couldn't figure out that they should have rethought their commitment."

The bill now goes to the Senate, where California's two senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, have vowed to defeat it. But the message from the new, John Boehner-led reformed Republican House to American business couldn't be clearer: We're not going to let anything so vulgar as evidence, or our ostensible belief in states' rights, sway our judgment when the interests of our financial backers are at stake. Money still talks here; money screams.

## Recipes

### Roasted Vegetable Spread

- 1 bell pepper, sliced into rings
- 1 medium onion, sliced into rings
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 small zucchini, sliced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 8 oz cream cheese
- kosher salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- challah, foccacia, or pita bread, for serving

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Place the bell pepper, onion, garlic, zucchini, and olive oil in a medium mixing bowl and toss until the vegetables are coated. Spread the vegetables evenly on sheet pan lined with foil and place to the oven.

Roast, tossing occasionally, until they are soft and are beginning to turn brown around the edges, approximately 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool completely.

Place the vegetables in the bowl of a food processor along with the cream cheese and process until well combined and spreadable; do not process until completely smooth.

Taste and season with salt and pepper, if desired. Spread on soft bread, such as challah, foccacia, or pita bread. Store in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to 1 week.

### Spicy Beef Kabobs

- 1 1/2 to 2 pounds boneless beef sirloin
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1/2 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1/3 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup olive oil

Cut the beef into 1 1/2 to 1 3/4-inch cubes and place into a large mixing bowl. Set aside. In the bowl of a food processor combine the garlic, paprika, turmeric, cumin, salt, pepper and red wine vinegar. With the processor running drizzle in the olive oil.

Pour the marinade over the meat and toss to coat. Place in the re-

frigerator in an airtight container or a sealable plastic bag and allow to marinate for 2 to 4 hours.

Preheat the grill to medium-high heat. Thread the meat onto the skewers leaving about 1/2-inch in between the pieces of meat. Place on the grill and cook, with lid lowered, 2 to 3 minutes per side, 8 to 12 minutes in all (8 minutes for rare and 12 for medium).

Remove from the heat to aluminum foil, wrap and allow to rest for 2 to 3 minutes prior to serving.

### Chicken with Grape Tomatoes and Fried Basil

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped fresh basil
- 4 bone-in chicken breast halves
- salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/2 tsp ground dried thyme
- 2 cups water
- 1 cup uncooked long grain rice
- 1 pint grape tomatoes, halved

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook basil in oil until it begins to get crispy and has a strong basil smell; this will take several minutes. Scoop basil out of oil with a slotted spoon, and drain on paper towels. Remove half of the remaining oil from the pan.

Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper to taste, and brown in oil; this should take about 4 minutes per side. Stir in chicken broth, wine, and balsamic vinegar. Season with bay leaves and thyme. Cover, and simmer over low heat until chicken is done and sauce is reduced; this should take about 25 minutes.

In a small saucepan, combine water and rice. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook for 20 minutes. Place halved tomatoes in the pan with the chicken, cover, and simmer until the tomatoes are warm.

Spoon chicken pieces, tomatoes, and sauce over rice, and garnish with fried basil.